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The occupation of Ottawa: a timeline

A day-by-day accounting of events leading up to the police moving in on "Freedom Convoy" Protesters in downtown Ottawa.

Andrew Duffy

Feb 18, 2022 • February 24, 2022 • 9 minute read • [Join the conversation](#)



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A now-ex member of the western separatist Maverick Party, Tamara Lich, a former fitness instructor, launches a fundraiser on GoFundMe for “Freedom Convoy 2022.” She bills it as a transport truck protest against government vaccine mandates: “We are taking our fight to the doorsteps of our federal government and demanding that they cease all mandates against its people.”

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Some truckers are upset by new U.S. government rules requiring that they be fully vaccinated to enter the country. Similar rules in Canada bar unvaccinated U.S. drivers.

Monday, Jan. 24

Protesting truckers begin to approach Ottawa from east and west; some of the convoys are reported to be several kilometres long.

Wednesday, Jan. 26

The online fundraiser for the convoy tops \$5 million as the leading edge of the convoy crosses into Ontario from Manitoba.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Ottawa police Chief Peter Sloly calls the looming protest “a very fluid situation,” and warns local residents that disruptions could continue through the weekend in the downtown core.

Convoy organizers announce their destination as Parliament Hill. Planning for the arrival of up to 2,000 vehicles, the police say they’ll emphasize communication, de-escalation and peacekeeping.

Meanwhile, one convoy faction, the Canada Unity coalition, releases a memo saying it wants to form a committee with the Senate and Governor General to override those governments enforcing “unconstitutional” vaccine mandates.

Thursday, Jan. 27

As trucks mass outside Ottawa, GoFundMe releases \$1 million in donations to the truckers.

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believing the truckers have a legitimate right to protest, Story rejects an appeal by federal officials to keep trucks away from Parliament Hill and the Prime Minister's Office.

Friday, Jan. 28

Trumpeting air horns and draped in Canadian flags, several hundred trucks arrive in downtown Ottawa. A heavy police contingent meets the trucks and directs them to Wellington Street. By late afternoon, the street in front of Parliament Hill is jammed. Police keep one lane open for emergency vehicles.



Protesters gathered around Parliament Hill and the downtown core for the Freedom Convoy protest, some making their way from various locations across Canada, Sunday January 30, 2022. PHOTO BY ASHLEY FRASER /Postmedia

Saturday, Jan. 29

About 3,000 trucks and more than 15,000 protesters converge on downtown Ottawa, accompanied by the ongoing cacophony of air horns.

The Rideau Centre closes in the afternoon after maskless protesters confront masked employees. At the nearby Shepherds of Good Hope, protesters harass staff and demand food from its soup kitchen. A woman dances on the National War Memorial, and others in the crowd drape flags and anti-vaccine signs on the Terry Fox statue. Ottawa paramedics ask for police escorts after two ambulances are pelted with rocks. Some people openly display racist symbols such as swastikas and Confederate flags.

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The Ottawa police launch criminal investigations into the events at the National War Memorial and the Terry Fox statue, while a sympathy blockade in Coutts, Alta. shuts down access to the U.S.-Canada border crossing.



Monday, Jan. 31

Sloly defends the inaction of police – only one arrest was made on the weekend – saying officers had to ignore offences given the risk to public safety and themselves. Using force to make arrests, he says, could have incited a riot. Describing the protest as massive and dangerous, Sloly praises officers for preventing injuries and deaths.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, addressing the issue for the first time, says his government won't give in to “those who fly racist flags” or “engage in vandalism.”

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“We are not intimidated,” he says.

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A file photo of Ottawa Police Service Chief Peter Sloly. PHOTO BY TONY CALDWELL /Postmedia

Tuesday, Feb. 1

Élisabeth Bruyère Hospital staff report being harassed for wearing masks on the street. Premier Doug Ford appeals to the truckers to leave, saying they've been heard: "Now it's time to let the people of Ottawa get back to their lives."

Somerset Ward Coun. Catherine McKenney calls on the RCMP to assume policing duties near Parliament Hill so Ottawa police can concentrate on helping the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Wednesday, Feb. 2

At a briefing, Sloly warns city councillors the protest will likely grow and that he does not see a way to end it with police resources alone. "The longer this goes on, the more I am convinced there may not be a police solution to this demonstration," he says. Sloly suggests the military may have to be called in to help.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Officials also reveal that protesters, through negotiations with police, have been allowed to set up a logistics camp in the city-owned baseball stadium on Coventry Road.

Federal Conservative Erin O'Toole is voted out as party leader by a majority of his caucus members.

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Freedom Convoy organizer Ianora Dick tells a news conference the protesters plan to stay in Ottawa “until we see a clear plan” for the elimination of all COVID-19 mandates.

Mayor Jim Watson asks Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino for more federal resources to support Ottawa police.



Police patrol downtown Ottawa as a protest against COVID-19 public health measures enters its 11th day, with trucks and other vehicles blocking several streets on February 7, 2022. PHOTO BY TONY CALDWELL /Postmedia

Friday, Feb. 4

Ottawa police announce a “surge and contain strategy” to improve safety in downtown neighbourhoods. A crisis management firm, Navigator, helps police manage their communications.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

A wooden shack is built near Confederation Park to serve as a “community kitchen” for protesters.

Ottawa lawyer Paul Champ files a \$9.8 million class-action lawsuit against organizers of the protest on behalf of plaintiff Zexi Li, a 21-year-old public servant.

GoFundMe closes off a \$10 million fundraising account for the convoy, saying the protest violated its terms of service. It later agrees to refund all donations.

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**Saturday, Feb. 5**

A carnival atmosphere prevails in downtown Ottawa where children play in bouncy castles and two demonstrators ride on horseback, one carrying a Trump 2024 flag. Conservative MPP Randy Hillier tells about 5,000 Parliament Hill protesters, “This is the hill we die on.”

About 300 counter-protesters gather in front of city hall and face off with convoy protesters on the other side of Laurier Avenue.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

At a police board meeting, chair Diane Deans says the city is under siege: “This group is emboldened by a lack of enforcement by every level of government.”

Police leaders concede they weren’t prepared for what has become an occupation. “I don’t think we could have predicted what this has turned into,” says Deputy Chief Trish Ferguson.

Sloly says he didn’t have enough resources to end the occupation.

Fireworks cap off the night in the “red zone” downtown.

Sunday, Feb. 6

Mayor Watson declares a city-wide state of emergency. He says protesters “are calling the shots” inside the red zone.

Ottawa police announce anyone who attempts to resupply demonstrators with fuel will be subject to arrest.

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Protesters bring jerrycans of fuel into the downtown core as the truck convoy continues to shutdown Wellington Street and other major routes. PHOTO BY ERROL MCGIHON /Postmedia

Monday, Feb. 7

Protesters openly defy the police ban on refueling by filling some jerry cans with water, others with gasoline.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Sloly says he needs 1,800 officers from other services to end the protest. The Ottawa police has 1,200 sworn officers. “There are lessons to be learned, good, bad and ugly about what has taken place here,” he says.

Watson and Deans write to the prime minister, asking for more resources.

Ontario Superior Court Justice Hugh McLean grants a 10-day injunction against horn honking in downtown Ottawa.

In Windsor, Ont., protesters block the Ambassador Bridge, Canada’s busiest border crossing.

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**Tuesday, Feb. 8**

Horns in downtown Ottawa fall silent for the first time in 11 days in response to the injunction.

Police reveal the presence of children among the protesters is complicating their response to the crisis. Another complication is the fact that some heavy tow truck companies are refusing to move trucks from downtown Ottawa, the city says.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

A new “Freedom Convoy” fundraiser on the U.S. Christian crowdfunding platform GiveSendGo raises more than US\$6.3 million in just four days.

Wednesday, Feb. 9

Ottawa police warn that anyone who continues to block the street with a vehicle could face criminal mischief charges.

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Some trucks circled at the Ottawa International Airport on February 10, 2022. PHOTO BY JEAN LEVAC /POSTMEDIA

Thursday, Feb. 10

Protesters circle the airport, driving slowly, in an attempt to disrupt operations while videos surface of protesters in Ottawa swearing themselves in as “peace officers.”

The Ontario government obtains a court order, freezing money collected for protesters by GiveSendGo.

Conservative leadership candidate and Carleton MP Pierre Poilievre says in an interview: “I’m proud of the truckers and I stand with them.”

Friday, Feb. 11

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Ford declares a state of emergency in Ontario and tells those in Ottawa who have “held the city hostage for two weeks” to go home.

In Windsor, Trudeau suggests Ottawa police have the resources they need to end the protest. “I don’t accept the contention that the city of Ottawa has exhausted its tools and its resources,” he says.

Sloly tells the police board: “As soon as the new provincial orders are in effect, we will enforce them to the fullest extent that our resources allow.”

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Protesters in downtown Ottawa set up a large sound stage and hot tub.



Protesters Jean-Philippe and Gabriel, who declined to give their last names, sit in a hot tub at the protest in downtown Ottawa in this photo from Thursday, February 17, 2022. PHOTO BY LARS HAGBERG /REUTERS

Saturday, Feb. 12

Ottawa police launch an integrated command centre with the OPP and RCMP as an influx of weekend protesters again descends on the city.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Police begin to forcibly remove protesters from the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor, Ont.

Counter-protesters march through the Glebe, demanding police action in Ottawa.

Sunday, Feb. 13

Counter-protesters block 25 convoy vehicles near Billings Bridge and surround them for seven hours before allowing them to leave one at a time.

A letter released by the city confirms Mayor Watson offered to meet with organizer Tamara Lich if the protesters agree to move their trucks from residential areas.

Monday, Feb. 14

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Ontario Superior Court Justice Faye McEwen grants the City of Ottawa an injunction, restraining protesters from setting unlawful fires, discharging fireworks, causing noise or idling vehicles.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Ontario announces an end to most pandemic restrictions, including vaccine passports by March 1, following similar moves by Alberta and Saskatchewan.



Trucks were coming and going at the Coutts border crossing in this protest file photo. PHOTO BY DARREN MAKOWICHUK /POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Tuesday, Feb. 15

Police Chief Sloly's sudden resignation is accepted by the Ottawa Police Services Board. "Frankly," Deans says, "the response to the crisis so far has been ineffective at bringing this occupation to an end."

Ottawa Police Association President Matt Skof says "there's been a serious lack of direction provided front-line officers."

Sloly is replaced by interim Chief Steve Bell.

The border blockade in Coutts, Alta. ends peacefully with the departure of protesters one day after the RCMP arrest 13 people and seize a cache of firearms and ammunition.

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**Wednesday, Feb. 16**

The protest enters its 20th day in Ottawa with police handing out leaflets to downtown protesters, warning them to leave the area immediately or face arrest.

A vote by Ottawa city council removes Deans as head of the police services board after the board hires a new, interim chief, Matt Torigian, formerly of the Waterloo Regional Police Service. Outraged at Deans' treatment and convinced the board is being used as a political scapegoat, Coun. Rawlson King and Coun. Carol Anne Meehan resign their seats on the board, along with community member Sandy Smallwood.

They're replaced by Coun. Jeff Leiper and former board chair, Coun. Eli El-Chantiry, and community member Suzanne Valiquet.

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Coun. Diane Deans. PHOTO BY ERROL MCGIHON /Postmedia

Thursday, Feb. 17

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Ottawa police and other services secure a perimeter around downtown, and begin to make arrests. Among those taken into custody are protest organizers Tamara Lich and Chris Barber, both charged with counselling others to commit mischief.

El-Chantiry is elected as the new chair of the police services board. Torigian officially withdraws from the contract he signed to become the new, interim police chief, saying the job is impossible without the backing of Ottawa city council.

Deans accuses Watson of orchestrating her ouster in retaliation for her refusal to support his negotiations with protesters.

Downtown restaurants join the class action lawsuit, raising its damages claim to \$306 million.

Friday, Feb. 18

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A massive, complicated police operation unfolds in downtown Ottawa to remove the three-week old phalanx of trucks and protesters from city streets. The operation begins on the far edges of the protest, near Nicholas Street. Police say it will take days to complete. Lines of riot police advance slowly toward Wellington Street, telling protesters to leave or face arrest.

Tow trucks begin to remove the trucks left behind.

Protest organizer Pat King is arrested as he livestreams events from Ottawa.

Police make 70 arrests and tow 21 vehicles by late afternoon.

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